

Hobbies

Penny-wise is pound-foolish for savers of copper coins

By Roger Boye

Here are answers to more questions from Chicago Tribune readers.

Q—Does it make sense to save pennies for their copper value?

G. B., Chicago

A—No. The price of copper would have to exceed \$1.50 a pound—up from the recent price of about \$1.25 a pound—before the metal in a Lincoln cent made in 1981 or earlier is worth more than its face value.

During 1982, Uncle Sam switched to a copper-coated zinc composition that contains just 2.5 percent copper by weight. Copper prices would have to approach \$100 a pound before the "red metal" in the newer coins is worth a penny.

By the way, the government made both types of Lincoln cents in 1982. They look the same, but

the copper-coated zinc coin weighs less than its nearly all-copper cousin.

Q—Are there any rare dates to be found in our pocket change among the copper-nickel "clad" coinage that's been made since 1965?

S. A., Evanston

A—Yes. Perhaps the most famous is the 1982 no-mint-mark dime, a minting error that sometimes sells for at least \$125 if in "mint state" condition. All 1982 dimes in circulation are supposed to carry a "P" or "D" mint mark just above the date, but officials accidentally made 13,000 or more coins without a letter. Someone apparently forgot to stamp a mint mark into just one of the thousands of dies used to make dimes during 1982. Most of the error coins entered circulation in the Sandusky, Ohio, and Pittsburgh, Pa., areas.

Q—How can we detect counterfeits when investing in rare coins? What are some of the common forgeries?

H. B., Carol Stream

A—You should rely on the experts. Buy coins from a reputable dealer or, better yet, coins that have been authenticated, graded and encased in hard plastic by a company such as the Numismatic Guaranty Corporation. Forgers often will doctor digits on coin dates (such as changing the first "4" on a common 1944-D cent to make the year look like a rare 1914-D) or add a mint mark (such as a "D" to the common 1916 "mercury" dime to make it look like a rare 1916-D).

Q—What should we expect to pay to have my father's coin collection sold at auction?

F. B., Chicago

A—In many major coin auctions, the buyer pays the gavel price plus 10 percent and the

seller gets the gavel price less 10 percent. The auction company keeps the difference—20 percent of the gavel price—to pay for expenses. Of course, most large auction houses will accept as consignments only the rarest coins. Thus, you may have to dispose of the hoard in another way.



Uncle Sam is selling to collectors a bronze medal commemorating the 200th anniversary of the U. S. Coast Guard. The

"heads side" depicts a rendering of Anton Otto Fischer's painting "To the Rescue" and the "tails side," the official Coast Guard seal with the motto "Semper Paratus" ("Always Ready") and the words "United States Coast Guard 1790."

To order, call the U. S. Mint Customer Service Center at (301) 436-7400 during business hours. A three-inch diameter medal costs \$21 and the 1½-inch medal—which has a much smaller surface area—costs \$2.25.